

Current listing of: T5776:2
SLUG: PM-Gates-CIA Bjt 02-19 1041
SERVICE: APTVrw

02/19/87 01:52 Page: 1
DATE: 02/19/87 01:31:37
STORY: 0215

OPERATIONS CENTER PRESS

^PM-Gates-CIA, Bjt,1037< ^Congress Using Gates Hearings As Chance To Harness CIA< ^LaserPhoto WX5< ^An AP News Analysis< ^By LAWRENCE L. KNUTSON=
^Associated Press Writer=

WASHINGTON (AP) _ After a difficult decade of stop-and-go supervision of the nation's spies, the Senate Intelligence Committee is using the confirmation process of a new CIA director to try again to rein in an agency once condemned as a "rogue elephant."

The opportunity is provided by the unexpected illness and resignation of CIA Director William J. Casey and the proposed elevation of his deputy, Robert M. Gates, just as Congress opened investigations into the Iran-Contra controversy.

The secret sale of arms to Iran, described by Gates as "a risky gamble" that in hindsight should not have been tried, was one of hundreds of covert operations initiated by a president since the end of World War II.

Until the Senate and House intelligence committees were made permanent institutions in 1976, most of these closely held operations were conducted in the shadows, outside the realm of regular and consistent congressional oversight.

Assassination plots, experimentation with mind-altering chemicals, the organization of coups all were included in the characterization of the CIA by the late Sen. Frank Church as a "rogue elephant" which, by its very nature, was resistant to the control and guidance of Congress during the 1970s.

Since the Church committee reported in 1976, Congress has sought to make oversight of covert operations a matter of expected routine.

But under Casey, whose roots in intelligence work date to the wartime operations of the OSS in Europe more than four decades ago, and who is widely credited for shoring up CIA morale and bolstering its budget, lawmakers had increasingly complained that information was grudgingly and sparingly provided.

Sen. William Cohen, R-Maine, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, has said that in getting information from Casey, even behind closed doors and with guarantees of secrecy, one had to ask precisely "the right question."

And even if senators found the right question, they could count on getting only "half the right answer," Cohen said.

Gates has promised to end that. In testimony Tuesday and Wednesday, he repeatedly pledged to be forthcoming and forthright in the information he supplies. He acknowledged the CIA made mistakes in helping the National Security Council facilitate the Iranian arms sales, a covert operation the CIA had been forbidden by the White House to disclose.

And, reversing the stance he took on the first of the two days of public testimony, he told the committee he would feel it his duty as CIA director to report to the panel on any illegal intelligence activity by any U.S. agency, including the NSC.

The relationship between the congressional intelligence oversight committees and the CIA is of necessity a two-way street.

For his part, Sen. David Boren, D-Okla., the Senate panel's new chairman, has promised to guarantee that the CIA's secrets remain secret.

On the other hand, Boren and his committee want no more surprises about

Current listing of: T5776:2 02/19/87 01:52 Page: 2
what U.S. agents are up to, surprises such as the jolting 1984 revelation that the CIA had used contract employees to mine Nicaraguan harbors.

That goal of secrets shared and secrets kept can be achieved, both Gates and senators agree, only if a "relationship of mutual security and trust" is nurtured and sustained.

Gates said he believes the oversight committees should be told in advance about covert operations, except in emergencies when he said there might be justification for delaying for "several days."

He said it is clear the Iran-Contra disclosures have strained the CIA's relationship with Congress "to the breaking point."

And he said if he had reason to believe the relationship of trust with Congress was in new danger because knowledge of a covert operation had been withheld, he would "contemplate resignation."

Several senators said they are unconvinced Gates did all he could have done to make sure the CIA stayed within bounds at two key flashpoints during the Iran-Contra episode.

Some said Congress should have been told when NSC aide Lt. Col. Oliver L. North asked the CIA to make available a charter flight by an agency-owned aircraft to ferry what turned out to be a cargo of U.S. arms into Iran.

Others said Gates should have told Congress immediately when he was informed by a senior CIA analyst on Oct. 1 that disgruntled international arms dealers might expose the secret contacts with Iran by claiming that profits from the arms sales had been diverted to the Contras.

On Wednesday, Gates testified he told Casey on several occasions, including one last fall, that the Iran policy was wrong.

"I told the director that I thought the entire activity should be called off and that the whole policy was a bad idea," Gates said.

In testimony before a closed session of the committee Dec. 4, a transcript of which was declassified, Gates said he had not expressed his concern to his superiors in the agency, but he recanted Wednesday, saying he "misspoke."

Sen. Bill Bradley, D-N.J., accused Gates of trying to "pass the buck" to Casey and others.

And Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., said Gates came close to "dissembling" by trying to distance himself from Casey's initial and only testimony on the possible diversion of the arms sale profits.

That testimony, Specter complained, was scanty, incomplete and possibly deceptive.

And Cohen said, "You basically didn't want to rock the boat. You were not prepared to lay your career on the line for a matter you did not create. You didn't want to know about it."

Whether that was the case or not, Gates says that if confirmed the responsibility for knowing such things will be his.

The confirmation process, he said, has been a healthy ordeal which has cleared the air and helped get the facts on the table.

And as the public phase of the process closed, both the nominee and key senators agreed progress had been made.

Summing up, Cohen told reporters, "I would say he has taken a very large step toward reestablishing trust."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Lawrence L. Knutson covered the congressional investigation into alleged illegal activities by the CIA a decade ago and is now one of the AP reporters covering the Iran-Contra affair.

AP-NY-02-19-87 0134EST<